

"But if all the Jews are spared?"

"I have some reputation for justice—though I believe you were implying a moment ago that I had not dealt justly with you. The Arabs, at the hands of My people, have already suffered some injustice, and many of My people know it. Why wipe them all out for no end?"

"Wouldn't the world be better without them?"

"They, too, have learned from My word—they worship Me, too, in their fashion."

The Messiah curbed himself from retorting: "You're getting entirely too broad-minded!"

"But what a garbling it is of Thy Word Thou gavest us!" was what he exclaimed aloud.

"You pity your own disappointment," answered God, partly quoting Himself, "and shall I not pity Ishmael, that great people of more than twenty million persons, who hardly know their right hand from their left, and also many camels?"

In the irritation caused by dismay, the young man had the impulse to sneer: "Do

you have to give me those old gags?" But what he asked was, "There's not to be a Judgment Day?"

"Not at once."

"Am I still the Messiah?"

"You must live like any other man."

"But I've built my whole life up to this—ever since you first called me, ever since I became Bar Mitzvah!" He had to rein himself in not to cry out, "You can't do this to me! I might have succeeded in the Gentile world. I could have been a big commercial physicist. I was working on the bomb when you took me away—and I was one of the coming men. Now I can never go back: after tonight, I'll be listed as a screwball. You wouldn't let me make good with the goys, and now I can't lead my people back to Israel. What do you expect me to do?" But what he said was, "My Lord, be blessed to eternity. Thy servant has failed Thee: forgive him, I beg, and direct him to the path of righteousness. Where shall I turn next?"

"Go back to your old work," said the Voice. "Go on raising money for Israel. Maybe some good will come of it."

## Christmas Holiday

IN THE december graveyard blossom moved  
 against remembering stone, softer than snow.  
 Along the christmas river we surprised  
 buds in the act of daring, sweet as toffee,  
 fields lay stretched and steaming in the sun,  
 and smoke was neat as feathers on the sky.  
 But discandying breath was only held. We heard  
 the afternoon turn over in its sleep  
 restless before it woke and blew us elsewhere  
 to practise separation like a scale  
 over and over until we run foolish.  
 To hoard and stroke the past till now is gone.  
 To forget the past is now or not at all.

*Pat Kavanagh*

# The Snag

## *A Story by V. S. Pritchett*

THE marriages of middle age, the mad impromptus of reason, are the satisfying ones. By that time our obsessions have accumulated and assert their rights, and we find peace in the peculiarities of others. I am thinking of Mrs. Barclay and myself.

Our difficulty was the common one of turning a love affair into a marriage. We were held up by talking about it and by Sophia Barclay's belief in the sacred inferences of her divorce. She had been divorced from her husband in a noisy way years before I met her; she remembered what she wore in court; she was fixed in the occasion. This gave her a moral advantage over me that was too vested to be stimulating. She was like a cautious widow with a little capital but hers was that perfect disaster. Never myself having been married or divorced I had nothing equal to put into a settlement. We had reached a deadlock. And then my luck turned. Always rushing round to parties, often mixed up in her own or other people's love affairs, Sophia was the subject of a lot of gossip. Her taste for calamity involved her in a slander action which, for three hilarious days, the British public got to know of as "the Barclay case." Our lives suddenly became theatre. We spoke lines to each other which could only have been spoken on the stage. Here, at last, was the dramatic impetus that we needed. I must get her out of the limelight, I thought. I took action. It was July. I found a cottage in Wales where we could escape for a month. The Monday after the case I went up to get the place ready. On the Wednesday I was to re-

turn to London and fetch her and we would get married.

The cottage was a simple, cream-painted gate lodge with sharp Gothic windows. It was darkened by one of those tall firs that are often seen in rectory gardens and which are sometimes called Clergyman trees. One felt almost married standing under it. There was one advantage in the place from my point of view: it had no telephone. In our London days, Sophia's telephone had been my pestiferous rival, for Sophia lived by it. A few hours before returning to London to fetch her and on the day when I considered myself to be officially "running away with Mrs. Barclay" a boy arrived with a telegram from her. It told me to wait because she had decided to drive up to me. I had forgotten about telegrams. I saw that now I was not, in the strictest sense, "running off with Mrs. Barclay." The struggle for power had begun.

And so I see her as she was, on that day, driving towards me in the Border country. Sophia was a single-minded driver, but the mind she used was the unconscious. I see her green car unpredictable in the traffic lanes, waltzing at corners. I hear her shouted at by other motorists, I see her chancing the yellow light, parking in the wrong place at Cheltenham, backing into the traffic stream at the narrow end of Worcester, making cyclists swerve. She had a small pink hat half hidden in her hair, at an angle which gave her pale face the look of folly the waning moon has in a windy sky. I could imagine the restlessness of her pretty and conversable shoulders. I did not know what to do with myself until two o'clock when she was to arrive, and